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UNDERCOVER POLICING INQUIRY: ERNEST RODKER'S STATEMENT

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APRIL 28, 2021

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Oli Rodker today delivered a witness statement on behalf of his father, Ernest Rodker, as part of the Undercover Policing Inquiry. See below for a summary of the key points, and Ernest's biography.

Ernest Rodker, 84, has been an active and leading campaigner on many of the major issues, debates, and events that have shaped Britain for decades, including:

- The campaign against nuclear weapons and war in the 1960s with the [Committee of 100](#) (which included philosopher Bertrand Russell)
- The anti-apartheid movement and the campaign against sporting tours by apartheid South African rugby and cricket teams in the 1970s
- The Stop the Seventy Tour and the direct-action group (DAG)
- The campaign against the redevelopment of Battersea Power Station by the council into luxury housing in the 1980s. He was a founding member of the Battersea Redevelopment Action Group (BRAG), which wanted affordable council housing, community projects and facilities
- The 'Pavement Collective', which sought to publicise the actions of those who defended their local community and encourage campaigns by local communities on issues like housing, race, jobs and similar. The Collective also sought to challenge the council on some of its policies e.g. on housing and redevelopment
- He has remained active in campaigning well into his later years, and has been most recently involved in environmental campaigning against open cast mining and the protection of the environment

You can find the full statement [here](#), and a link to the timings [here](#).

Key points and quotes:

"I am asked what were the aims of STST [Stop the Seventy Tour]. Its immediate and principal aim was to stop the white-only South African cricket team from touring in the UK in 1970. More broadly, its aim was to make a very strong political point that people representing apartheid were not welcome in the UK.

"We sought to impress on the South African teams the fact that as an all-white team effectively promoting the apartheid regime they were not welcome. We wanted them to know the level of opposition there was to what they stood for and for them to reflect on whether it was the right thing, practically and ethically, to tour the UK.

"We used all classic forms of non-violent direct action ('NVDA') – pitch invasions being the most prominent. We understood and sought to follow the well-known principles of NVDA and civil disobedience learned from recent history such as the struggle for Indian independence by Mahatma Gandhi and for black civil rights by Dr Martin Luther King.

"It is worth underlining that we were effective in the sense that, in the short term, the rugby team was, we learned, keen to stop the tour and wanted to go home, as a result of our actions. In the medium term we contributed towards the decision to abandon the 1970 cricket tour plans. And in the long terms we contributed to the isolation of apartheid South African from international sport, a factor in its eventual downfall.

"I am not surprised that they [Special Branch and the Special Demonstration Squad of undercover police] monitored my activities. This is partly because, before I was involved in the campaign against apartheid, I was involved in the Committee of 100. This was a British anti-nuclear group of the 1960s. It had come to the attention not only of the media, but also the police, prosecutors and the courts as a result of its high-profile campaign and campaigning methods, involving NVDA.

"For example, through my involvement in the Committee, I and many others in the Committee, including the philosopher Bertrand Russell, had been sent to prison as a result of our campaign of non-violent direct action against US nuclear bases. This came about when a number of us were prosecuted for planning disruptive demonstrations and civil disobedience. We appeared at, I think, Bow Street magistrates' court and were found guilty of a breach of the peace ... We were given the option of agreeing to be 'bound over' to keep the peace or to go to prison for 3 months or more. Most of us chose to go to prison. I seem to remember that some of the evidence used against us included evidence from the police of covert surveillance of our plans and discussions for action.

"[In the anti-apartheid movement] we were involved in civil disobedience. We were putting our bodies in the way of apartheid South African tourists... We were doing nothing on the scale of what the South African State regime was doing to its majority black citizenship under apartheid, systematically and repeatedly, under cover of 'the law'.

"I would like answers from this Inquiry on the following issues... I would like to know what information UCOs obtained from those campaigns and what was done with that information. I would also like to know whether and if so how, any UCO sought to disrupt the campaigns... I am concerned about UCOs interfering in the organizing of political groups, such as the ones I was involved in. It is worth bearing in mind that these were often small groups, run by their members, all of whom were volunteers, and I would be very concerned to learn if UCOs were participating in the political decision-making of those groups.

"I am asked about two Special Branch reports... containing very personal information about the birth of one of my children and a health condition of mine. It is not a surprise to me that the police were monitoring some of the activities I was involved in. But it is a surprise to me that they were taking a note of the birth of my son and health. Those things were unconnected with political activity and were of a particularly personal nature.

"I am particularly surprised that these records have been kept for over 40 years. This is also quite sinister. It is not as if I was an international criminal. It is reminiscent of the behaviour of authoritarian states. It has no legitimate justification.

"It reinforces me in my view that I would like to have from the police, through the Inquiry, all information all UCOs and SB have recorded and stored about me, at any point.

"I [was the organiser of] a demonstration [in May 1972] at a Richmond hotel [the 'Star & Garter'] on the occasion of the British Lions' rugby team's departure to the airport for their tour of apartheid South Africa. I see that 'Michael Scott', an UCO, attended the planning meeting for the demonstration [and was involved in it and the subsequent criminal proceedings].

"Our plan was to blockade the UK rugby team's coach at the... hotel in the hope that the players would miss their flight to apartheid South Africa for their forthcoming tour there. I was arrested and prosecuted, certainly for obstruction of the highway [and convicted, as was 'Michael Scott'].

"References in the intelligence reports... appear to show that 'Michael Scott' and those receiving the reports knew that most of those arrested were not guilty.

"Evidence from 'Michael Scott', supportive of the defendants' account (and contradicting uniformed police officers' evidence) would, coming from a serving police officer, have been more credible than had it come just from protesters.

"I was very concerned to learn, many decades later, that an undercover police officer was involved in the demonstration, was arrested with me and stood in court with me and others. I am concerned that he did this in his false identity – that he may have given the court a false name and that he may have given evidence in that false name. Furthermore, that undercover officer was convicted and sentenced under that false name.

"I am concerned that it appears that neither I, my co-accused, our lawyers, the prosecution or the court were not made aware of 'Michael Scott's' true identity.

"I am concerned that this officer appears to have been involved in discussions within the group of activists / defendants about how to deal with the prosecution. 'Michael Scott' may also have been privy, either indirectly (from what people told him) or directly (by attending meetings) to private legal discussions between activists / defendants and their lawyer. He may even have influenced or had the opportunity to influence those discussions.

“He may have reported – directly or indirectly – to the prosecution what was discussed, supposedly confidentially, between the activists and / or their lawyer.

“I note that there is a reference [in police documents] to the police being conscious of the ‘potential of embarrassment to police’ if ‘Michael Scott’ were to have been involved in the protest and in the criminal prosecution, in his cover name and then for it, later to come out that he was an UCO. This seems to highlight a failure to have procedures and criteria for the oversight of UCOs in this situation. There is no mention in the note of more important concerns – that the other defendants in the criminal proceedings should have a fair trial, that innocent demonstrators should not be convicted of offences they have not committed etc. The only concerns expressed seem to be for institutional damage to the police. The failure to view activists as individuals with their own legitimate rights and interests and the decision to place those second to the unfettered gathering of information on them may be a precursor to some of the more gross abuses of activists that, I note, happened in later periods of undercover policing of campaigners.

“It seems to me that my political activities before 1968, and the intelligence held on me by the police during this period, are relevant to this Inquiry. For example, I refer to these comments in...the report [which] describes me as follows: *‘This man has been a thorn in the flesh for several years now, having had no fewer than 14 court appearances prior to 1963 for offences involving public disorder. He was considered to be a menace at the time of the protest demonstrations taking place in this country concerning the Springboks rugby tour in 1969 and the Stop the 70s Tour in 1970’*. I do not accept this characterization of me, the other protesters or our actions...my arrests were for acts of NVDA and civil disobedience and were against nuclear weapons and the apartheid South African regime. The intemperate language in this report suggests a lack of judgement on the part of the police and a lack of respect for the right of peaceful protest.

“I challenge the legitimacy of the police spying on me at all, and to such an extent and then retaining these records for such a long period of time.”

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Timings

- Ernest Rodker's statement to the Inquiry was read out by his son, Oli Rodker, on Wednesday 28 April at 2pm-5pm.
- Professor Jonathan Rosenhead will give evidence to the Inquiry on Thursday 29 April at 10.30am-1pm.
- Christabel Gurney OBE will give evidence to the Inquiry on Thursday 29 April at 2pm-5pm.
- Lord Peter Hain will give evidence to the Inquiry on Friday 30 April from 10am-5pm.

More information on the AAM memo to the government in 1982 can be found here:

- <https://www.aamarchives.org/archive/campaigns/government/gov19-aam-memorandum-for-meeting-with-the-home-secretary.html>
- <https://www.aamarchives.org/archive/campaigns/government/gov24-memorandum-to-the-home-secretary.html>

